Lonicera maackii

Tackled by Nashville's Metro Parks and Recreation Department and Vanderbilt University

by Jill Smith and Steve Baskauf
photos by Dr. Steven J. Baskauf, Vanderbilt University

One professor, two park staff members, seven college classes, fifteen teaching assistants, and nearly 400 students added up to one great team that spent a week removing bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii)* from one of the 100 Metro parks in Nashville, Tennessee. The Warner Parks, a 2,700-acre area listed on the National Register of Historic Places in southwest Nashville, was the project focus for the partnership.

With the promotion of Warner Park staff to get schools out of the classroom and into the Park, and the dedication of one professor to teaching his students in a service-learning environment, the weeklong venture was a great success. Planning began months in advance to prepare for additional tools, site planning, pre-lab assignments, organization, transportation, and in-depth training for the teaching assistants. Students were given a reading assignment that gave a historical account of the introduction of *Lonicera maackii* to the United States. It described the impact of bush honeysuckle on natural areas and the mode of distribution through local garden centers and the Soil Conservation Service. Seven lab classes with 30-60 students per class spent 1½ hours in the Park. They were transported by van to the same location every day where they could see the work already accomplished by their classmates. Park staff gave an introduction that addressed the problem of invasive exotic plants and animals, Warner Parks problem plants and the difficulties faced in removing them, prevention, plant identification and tool safety.

Students were given gloves, a plant sample, and either a mattock or a weed wrench. They worked in groups of 15 with their teaching assistant to confirm that they only were removing the target plant while leaving native trees and shrubs to flourish. The size of trees, *Lonicera maackii* shrubs were no match for the strength of the college students who stood next to 15' specimens without shying away from the challenge of removing them. The slope of the work site made safety a concern but also contributed to the success of the students. *Lonicera maackii* does not root deeply on slopes with rocky soils, so removing the largest shrubs and their roots was both possible and thorough. Students seemed to enjoy the experience and felt the rewards of their work as they left the site. Instead of walking through a dense forest with no sunlight reaching the earth, they saw *Lonicera maackii* shrubs hanging upside down from trees to dry out, and native plant leaves glistening with sunlight.

Not only did this project help the Parks directly but hopefully it will continue to affect natural areas as these students spread the word about invasive plants and reflect back on a day in 2003 when they saved the Warner Parks from a horrible dominating weed.

For more information, contact Jill Smith at Warner Park Nature Center, (615)352-6299 or Dr. Steve Baskauf at Vanderbilt University, Steve.Baskauf@Vanderbilt.edu